

Love Is Our Priority

1 John 4:7-12

How many of you remember the old country and western song, "I Love" by Tom T. Hall? The lyrics go this way:

I love little baby ducks, Old pick up trucks, Slow moving trains, and rain. I love little country streams, Sleep without dreams, Sunday School in May, and hay, And I love you, too.

I love leaves in the wind, Pictures of my friends, Birds of the world, and squirrels. I love coffee in a cup, Little fuzzy pups, Bourbon in a glass, and grass. And I love you, too.

I love honest open smiles, Kisses from a child, Tomatoes on the vine, and onions. I love winner's when they cry, Loser's when they try, Music when it's good, and life. And I love you, too.

We use the word "love" a lot, and I'm afraid that our use of it can be rather confusing. For instance, I do not hesitate to tell you that I love my wife. We have been married for more than 25 years. She has been my companion, my encourager, my counselor, faithful & loving throughout all those years, & I tell you unashamedly that I love my wife.

I also love Colorado. I love it because the blue skies. I love it because of the beautiful mountains and canyons. But most of all, I love it because of our church and the people here.

But even though I used the same word "love" to describe my feelings toward my wife & toward Colorado, I trust you realize that I don't love them in quite the same way.

Our English language is limited. We use this one word as a catch-all for many different feelings. "I love my wife. I love Colorado. I love my dogs. I love cherry pie. I love a sunny day. I love my home."

Since we use the same word to express all those different emotions, we depend a lot upon the person who hears us to put our words through the filter of understanding, and then to arrive at the correct conclusion.

When I say, "I love my wife," I trust you to take those words & filter them & reach the conclusion that "He loves his wife the way that a man ought to love his wife."

When I tell you that I love Colorado, I trust you to understand that I am not weird, & therefore I don't love a place in the same way that I love my wife. I trust you to put those words through the filter & reach the conclusion that I love a place in the way that a man ought to love a place.

1. There are two basic priorities in the life of every maturing Christian: he relentlessly pursues truth and actively loves others. The last two weeks we examined 1 John 4:1-6 and learned how to "**test the spirits**" because we need to pursue truth. In vv.7-12, we return to the priority of love. We can't separate truth from love. One of the main tactics of the evil one is to emphasize love without truth or visa versa. Love without truth produces a bland, ineffective liberalism. Truth without love produces a cold, divisive legalism.

2. Jesus Himself the full expression of God's truth and the full expression of God's love. Eph.4:15 says, "**but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head; Christ.**" When we learn to balance love and truth, we become like Jesus.

3. In this climactic section of the book, John tells us that love is to be priority one in our lives for three basic reasons: because *God is love*, because *God has loved us* and because *God lives in us*.

I. Love is our Priority because God is Love (vv.7-8).

A. God is the ORIGIN and the SOURCE of True Love.

1. In v.7 we see "**love is of God**" and in v.8 we see "**God is love.**" Because "**God is love**" all true love flows through Him and from Him.

2. John says "**God is love.**" This doesn't mean love is something God does, but love is who God is. Because He is love, everything He does is done in love, even His judgment. Just as we saw in chapter 1 that "**God is light**" (1:5) and to be near Him is to walk in the light, because "**God is love**" when we abide in Him we will love others.

3. God does not have to work at love try to love. Unlike people, God doesn't go looking for love. He doesn't fall in love one day and out of love the next day. He never says, "I don't love you like I used to love you" or "I don't love you anymore." He doesn't go through these up and down feelings because His very nature, the essence of His being is love. There is nothing that God does that is not loving because God is love.

What does that mean for us?

B. Because God is Love, God's Children are to Love.

1. In v.7, John says, "**Beloved let us love one another.**" He assures his readers of his love for them with the intimate title "**beloved**" and then encourages them to follow his example and love others. John is a preacher who "practices what he preaches!"

2. If "**God is love**" and "**love is of God**" it only makes sense that "**everyone who loves is born of God and knows God**" will love like He loves.

3. Unbelievers can never act in true love. You might say, "**Pastor, I have a friend or family member who makes no claim to Christianity, but he or she is a loving person.**" The unsaved person can love in an earthly sense. She can have deep affection and strong feelings but when the feelings fade often the love fades also.

4. In v.8, John says that the one who "**does not love does not know God.**" It is impossible to be mature [to "**know God**"] and not love. When I truly get to know God intimately I experience God's love. A lack of love shows a lack of maturity. It shows that I have not really gotten to know God very well.

Someone has written the little verse:

To dwell above with saints we love,
that will be grace and glory--
To live below with saints we know ... that's another story!

5. How many of you know someone in whom a passion for God once burned bright; he is a believer but his fellowship with God is no longer close? She used to be filled with God's love but now she has become bitter, resentful, and loveless. Such a person may be saved, but no longer abides closely in Christ. Because he is not growing in the Lord, God's love is not visibly present in his life.

6. John says as believers we are to "**love one another**" because God is love and He lives in us. He gives us the ability to love as He loves. If God is truly in you, He wants to love through you.

7. Rom.5:5 says, "**...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**" Now He wants His love to be poured out through our lives to others.

8. "**God is love.**" The Bible doesn't say, "love is god." We do not define God by what we know about love. We define love by what we know about God. Just because you feel love for

someone doesn't mean your emotions are from God. If you are married and you begin to have feelings for someone other than your spouse, that is not God's love, it's lust. If you are a believer and think you have fallen in love with an unbeliever, that is not God's love according to truth.

II. Love is our Priority because God Loves Us (vv.9-11).

*God demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to be our Savior. Let's note six facets of God's love in sending His Son.

A. God's Love is VISIBLE (v.9a).

1. God's love can always be seen. V.9 says, "**The love of God was manifested** [revealed or made known] **toward us.**"
2. Biblical love is not a feeling or an emotion. It is a decision to act and the action can always be seen.
3. Any relationship that doesn't show love is not true love. The husband who says to his wife, "**I love you**" but never lifts his hand to make her life easier is not operating under God's love.
4. There are many visible evidences of God's love for us. He provides our every need. We have food, clothing and shelter. We have life and health. Every breath we breathe is a reminder of God's love. Max Lucado writes, "If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, he'll listen. He can live anywhere in the universe, and He chose your heart... Face it, He's crazy about you."
5. In the Old Testament God showed His love in His calling, protection and redemption of Israel.
6. However, the supreme evidence of God's love for mankind is that He has "**sent His only begotten Son into the World.**"

Harry Ironside told of a woman who said to him, "I don't have any use for the Bible and for all this Christian superstition. It's enough for me to know that God is love." He said to her, "Well, do you know that?" She said, "I've known it all my life." He said, "Do you think that everyone knows that?" "Yes," she said, "everyone knows God is love." He asked, "Do you think that woman in India, who is persuaded by her religion to throw her child into the river as an offering to the crocodiles, has any concept or idea that God is love?" She said, "No, but that's mere superstition." Ironside asked, "Do you think that African who bows to his idols of wood and stone, trembling lest they should destroy his crops, take away his children or injure him has any idea that God is love?" She said, "No, but in every civilized country we know that God is love." "How do we know that," he asked, "how do we know that God is love?" He continued, "Do the ancients teach this? Do the other religions of earth teach that God is love, and show that God is love? The only reason we know that God is love is because he sent his Son. The book that tells about the Lord Jesus Christ is the only book in the world that contains the idea that the God behind all created matter is a God of love. Creation reveals his power, his greatness, and his might, but there is nothing in nature that says, 'God is love.' The only way we know it is that God manifested his love in the giving of his Son." God's love is seen in Him coming to earth as a man and dying for our sins!

B. God's Love is COSTLY (v.9b).

1. A while back, an unbeliever asked me a good question. He asked, "**What's the big deal with Jesus? Why couldn't God just create another son to replace Him?**" The answer of

course is that God didn't create Jesus. He is the self-existent "**only begotten Son**" of the Father.

2. We find the title "**only begotten Son**" only six times in the NT. It means "**one and only**" (NIV) and means that Jesus is unique. God did not create a Savior for us, but sent the One who is the "**express image of His person**" for us (Heb.1:3).

3. We should rejoice and say with Paul, "**Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!**" (2 Cor.9:15).

4. Loving someone is not always the easy thing to do. Sometimes it can be quite difficult. Sometimes it is costly. However, by the Spirit we can love people we don't like!

C. God's Love is PURPOSEFUL (v.9c).

1. God's purpose is "**that we might live through Him.**"

2. God not only "**sent His only begotten Son**" but He sent Him "**into the world**" to die for our sins. John points not only to the incarnation, that He came "**in the flesh**," but to the atonement, that Jesus died for us.

3. Our ultimate purpose in loving others should not be that we might feel good but that they might be blessed by God.

D. God's Love is DELIBERATE (v.10a).

1. God's love for us is deliberate and decisive. It is a specific, objective act not a subjective, fleeting emotion. We know this because God initiated our salvation. John says, "**In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us...**"

2. We didn't come to God for love; God came to us with love. V.19 says, "**We love Him because He first loved us.**"

3. One of the most beautiful verses in the Bible is Rom.5:8, "**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**"

4. Godly love loves the unlovely and unworthy. Who does God love? Pick up your phone book! He loves everyone!

5. Sometimes we get very angry at the rudeness, stubbornness and sinfulness of others. We get angry and feel justified in no longer having anything to do with them. That's when we need to remember that the God who sees and knows all our sins does not respond to us in anger and rejection. Rather, He responded with the costliest of all loves, the very life of His Son "**that we might live through Him.**"

Ray Stedman asks, "Is that not love? Does that not grip you? He did it that all the chains of fear, hate and evil which bind us and shackle us might be broken, these powerful forces within us might be subdued and brought into control, and quarreling, bickering, and abuse might cease between human beings. That is why he came. That it all might be replaced, not by negative nothingness, but by patience, acceptance, and the power to remain calm – 'in order that we might live'" (www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/1john/0163.html).

6. Don't naively measure your love by your warm feelings for God in worship or your diligence in reading the Bible, but measure your love for God by how you love His kids. His love is measured that way. Stamped forever in history is the greatest symbol of love, the bloody cross of Christ!

E. God's Love is JUDICIAL (v.10b).

1. V.10 also says God "**sent His Son to be the propitiation of our sins.**" "**Propitiation**" means expiation or "**atonement sacrifice**" (NIV). He made us "at one" with the Father.
2. God is not some indulgent grandfather who excuses our sins. God's nature is not only love, it is holy and true. Holiness and truth demand justice, retribution, reckoning and full payment to the satisfaction of His divine wrath.
3. That Jesus became our "**propitiation**" means that He took our place on the cross. He bore God's wrath on our sin in our place (Is.53:6; 2 Cor.5:21).

F. God's Love is EXEMPLARY (v.11).

1. John says, "**If God so loved us we also ought to love one another.**" "**Ought**," means, "owe it." We owe it to God to love others. In the way He sacrificed for us, we are to love each other.
2. Paul said in Rom.13:8, "**Owe no one anything except to love one another...**" (cf. Rom.1:14). Paul knew he owed God!
3. Because of this awesome example of self-sacrificing love, we dare not offer God ridiculous excuses like, "I just can't love that person," "You don't know what she did to me," or "He is just too weird to love."
4. "No one who has been to the cross and seen God's immeasurable and unmerited love displayed there can go back to a life of selfishness. Indeed the implication seems to be that our love should reflect His love" (Stott, p.166).
5. If you have experienced the overwhelming cleansing of your sins at the cross, the forgiveness of your unbridled lusts, your antagonisms and hatreds, you "**ought**" to love others.

III. Love is our Priority because God Loves Through Us (v.12).

A. We serve an Invisible God.

1. John says, "**No one has seen God at any time.**" If somebody says he has seen God, he is nuts! (4:20; 1 Tim.1:17; 6:16).
2. In the OT, many saw God in a limited sense. Abraham talked with God by the tree of Mamre. Jacob wrestled with God. Isaiah saw a vision of Him high and lifted up. Moses saw His glory on the mountain. But no one saw God in the fullest sense, in His full awesome power and majesty.
3. In the NT, people saw God when they saw Jesus. John 1:18 says, "**No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.**"
4. Though people have seen visions and the physical presence of God in Christ, no one has ever seen God in His transcendent, magnificent reality.

B. Our Invisible God becomes Visible in our Love.

1. John further says, "**If we love one another, God abides in us and His love has been perfected [fulfilled] in us.**"
2. If no one has seen God, how can He be known now? The unseen God now reveals Himself not in visions, theophanies or fire and smoke on a mountain. He does not now physically reveal Himself in His Son. The unseen God is revealed in you and me when we love each other with His limitless love. No one can see the essence of God but they can see the actions of God in us.

3. When Moses came down from the mountain, Israel saw God's glory reflected on His face. They didn't see God because they had been to the mountain, but because Moses had been to the mountain. God wants His glory to shine on your face.

4. God can love through you. He simply waits for you to become willing, then He does the loving. *Many of us here today need to repent before God and ask Him to love through us.*

5. Yes, God is invisible. As long as we love only those who love us, He remains invisible, no one gets to see God. However, when we decide to act in love toward those who are nasty to us, angry with us and bitter toward us, when we return to them patience, tenderness, consideration and thoughtfulness, suddenly those around us realize God is with us. He becomes visible in our love!

6. People may have read *The Gospel According to Matthew*, as well as *Mark*, *Luke* and *John*. However, when you love those who do not deserve your love, they will read the gospel according to you.

7. Even when you cannot humanly love, God can love through you. In *The Hiding Place*, Corrie Ten Boom shares how God loved a former prison guard through her. She writes:

It was at a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there - the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein," he said. "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!"

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile; I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again, I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot love him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.

(Thanks to Coy Wylie for the outline for this sermon).